

# Rocking the Boat in the Bronx

by John Michael Vargo

Hard against the Cross Bronx Expressway in an unassuming storefront is the inner-city heart of Rocking the Boat.

Inside, Bronx High School students in a small well-equipped shop are building a 16th century lap strake hulled rowboat. Meeting two nights a week under the supervision of boat builder, Chris Kantz.

This afternoon with Chris's help, a program assistant and a student, Elsie and Manny are wrestling a fire bent oak plank around the frame of what will be the companion of the 16th century sailboat, The Onrust being built in Rotterdam, N. Y. Nearby Javier, another program assistant is shaving a wooden oar into shape.



Elsie and Manny are wrestling a fire bent oak plank.

While Chris and his assistants continued working, I am introduced to the founder and director Adam Green.

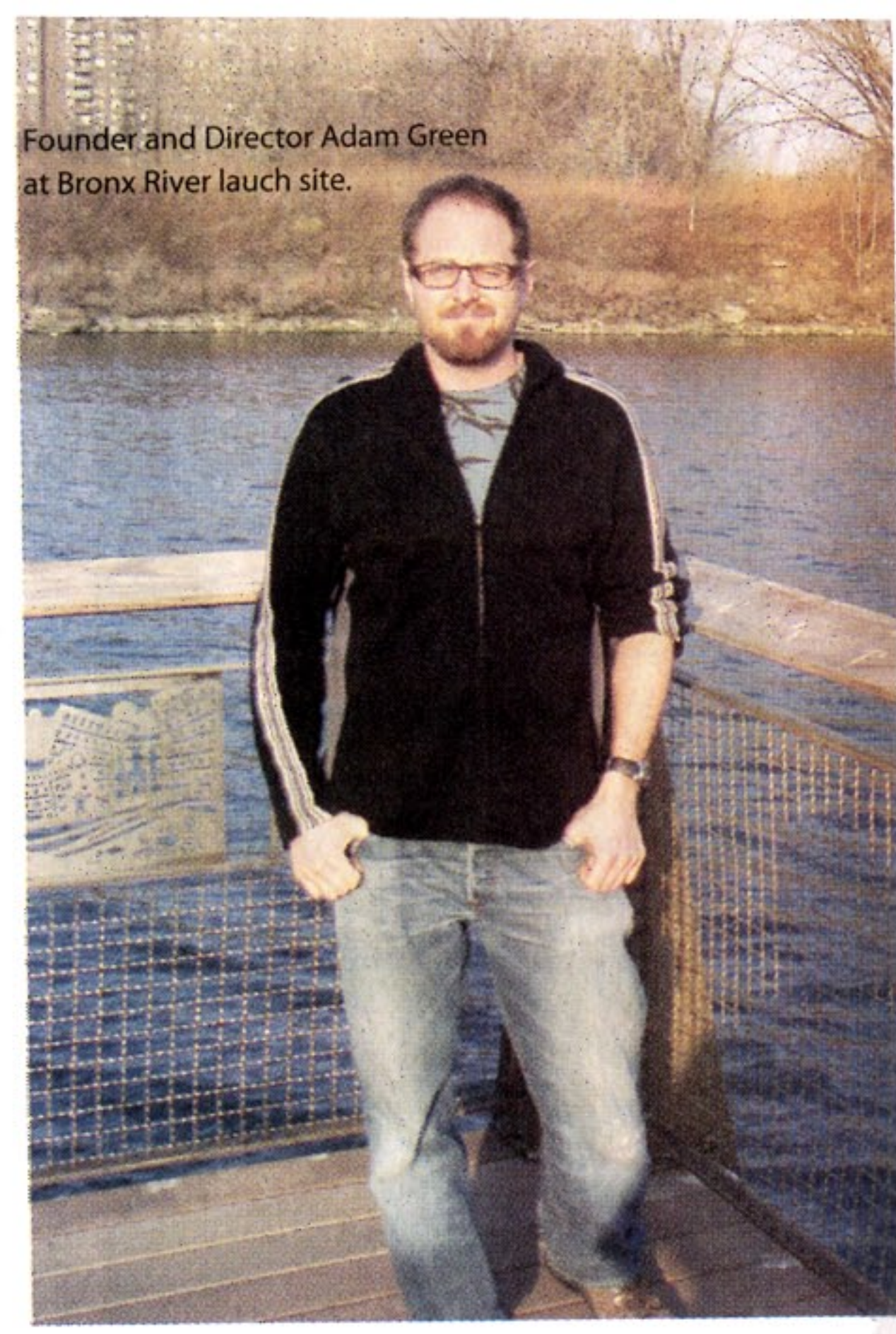
A city boy himself albeit from Manhattan, Adam became enthralled with boating as a child after taking an excursion on the Clearwater with his parents. After graduating from Vassar, he taught Junior high school in East Harlem. While there, along with ten students he built an eight-foot dinghy that had it's sea trials in the school's swimming pool. From this inauspicious beginning came the seeds for Rocking the Boat.

After teaching for three years he joined the crew of the Clearwater to sharpen his skills as a boat builder. After an eight-month apprenticeship he returned to New York City and, in collaboration with Hostos Community College in the South Bronx he started Rocking the Boat as a non-profit organization.

While we are talking a social worker enters the office to arrange a meeting with this semester's after school boat

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Founder and Director Adam Green at Bronx River launch site.



Javier shaping an oar.



builders. The students are all required to maintain a solid scholastic standing to continue to participate in the Rocking the Boat program. Student's having academic problems are offered tutoring.

Since Rocking The Boat first set up shop in nineteen ninety eight, they have completed twenty two traditional American designed wooden boats, including nearly ten Whitehall rowboats, a type very common on the waterways around New York City during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Rocking The Boat has also built many other traditional styles including a Cape Cod Oyster Skiff, a bateau, a colonial river ferry, a decked canoe, a Rangeley Lakes Boat a Peapod and a Melon seed Skiff. The program completes a boat each semester.

This year Rocking The Boat plans on consolidating its operations in its Hunts Point location in what was an urban wasteland. Here Rocking the Boat has another boatbuilding shop, storage lockers for boats and equipment, docks and

a launch beach on the Bronx River.

Inside the boat shop, Phineas Ramsey is laying out the frame for a eighteen-foot plywood powerboat. Phineas is a graduate of the Apprenticeship, a renowned wooden boat building school in Maine. Two students walked into the shop while I was there and introduced themselves, Toniann and Sabrina are taking part in the environmental facet of Rocking The Boat monitoring water quality in the Bronx River. Toniann, a junior in high school has ambitions to be an oceanographer while Sabrina has plans to be an urban park ranger.

From this site over two thousand students and area residents a year receive various maritime experiences including community rowing, environmental restoration, swimming lessons, traditional boat building and navigation techniques. For most of the participants it is their first experience on the water.

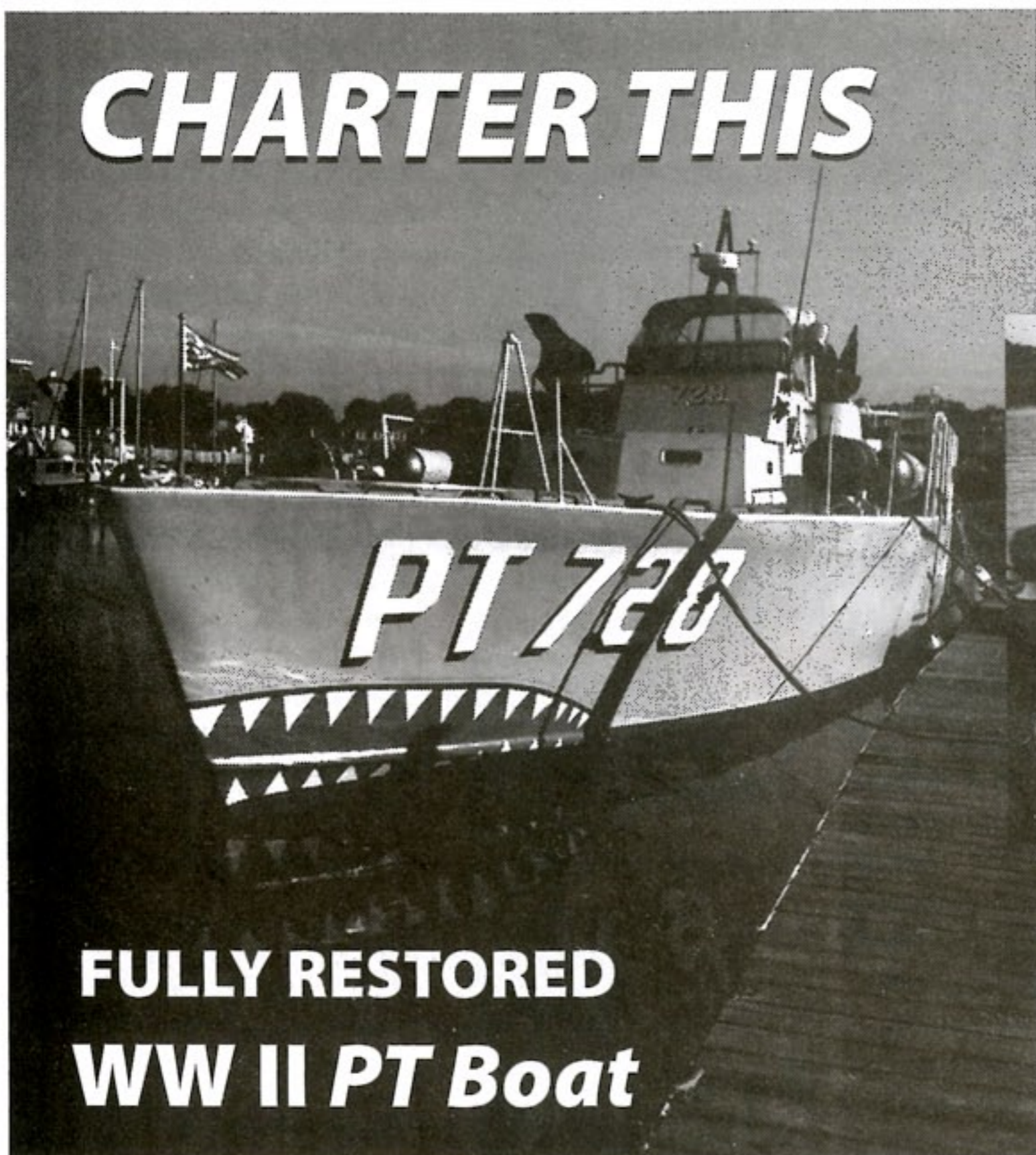
Rocking the Boat, a nonprofit organization operates on a budget of one point three million dollars a year. It has a full time staff of ten and three part time

employees. All graduates of the Rocking the Boat building program receiving an hourly wage. Students participating in the summer program receive a stipend. This summer program takes place at Phillipsburg Manor in Tarrytown. There, students dressed in eighteenth century garb; work with period tools to demonstrate traditional boatbuilding techniques.

During the summer the students also go on a boating/camping trip down the Hudson from Poughkeepsie to Croton Point Park. This summer they plan on taking their completed tender down the Bronx River into the East River and join the Onrust to mark the Quadricentennial celebrations.

Although Rocking The Boat has produced many skilled boat builders since it's inception this has never been its primary goal. Acquiring the skills to build a boat infuses the student with enough confidence to start life's travels on a vessel of their own creation.



For more information on Rocking the Boat go to [www.rockingtheboat.org](http://www.rockingtheboat.org).



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